

New legislation sets “Wildlife Crossing Zones” to protect drivers and wildlife

October 18, 2010 - WILDLIFE ON THE MOVE CAMPAIGN! - STATEWIDE - Motorists are reminded to slow down, drive cautiously during wildlife migration season.

It's that time again - Colorado wildlife are on the move! They are migrating to wintering habitats and that unfortunately leads to higher incidents of wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs). Each fall, a group of organizations* come together to for the “Wildlife on the Move” message to motorists statewide: be aware, drive with caution and slow down, especially at night, when the majority of WVCs occur.

*(*The organizations for the “Wildlife on the Move” campaign include the Colorado Department of Transportation, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado State Patrol, Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Agency and the Center for Native Ecosystems.)*

“As Colorado has an abundance of deer and elk, as well as other wildlife, that live near our urban and rural areas, motorists need to be aware that they can cross our roads without warning at most any time of day or night,” said Colorado State Patrol Chief Colonel James Wolfenbarger. “Slow down and stay alert when you see a highway wildlife warning sign especially between dusk and dawn. If you see one deer or elk, expect others. Remember to scan ahead on the sides of the road for signs of movement and to watch for the shining eyes of animals that reflect car headlights at night. Most importantly, slow down and concentrate on retaining control of your vehicle. It is important to maintain control before, during and after a collision with an animal should one occur. ”

Wildlife-vehicle collisions happen year round, 24/7. However, there is always an increase during migration season, and particularly during the hours between dusk and dawn. These collisions are not only a matter of safety, but can be quite costly as well.

“The insurance industry pays out nearly \$1.1 billion a year in claims for all wildlife-vehicle collisions nationwide—a big portion of that is in November, when these types of collisions increase,” says Carole Walker, Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association. “A single claim for a wildlife-vehicle collision is averaging \$2,900.”

NEW SAFETY LEGISLATION - This year, motorists will see more roadside reminders to slow down and watch for wildlife in specifically designated corridors. Recent legislation, sponsored by Representative Kathleen Curry and Senator Gail Schwartz (and several non-governmental organizations, listed below), calls for lowered nighttime speeds and doubled fines in designated “wildlife crossing zones.” (There are no fines for hitting an animal.)

“This program will make Colorado roads safer,” said Schwartz said. “Collisions with wildlife cost Colorado drivers lives and dollars. Thanks to these limited wildlife migration corridors, we can alert drivers, adjust speeds at certain times, protect drivers and wildlife, and help avoid dangerous collisions.”

Per the HB 1238, the Colorado Department of Transportation identified 100 miles of wildlife crossing zones where lowered nighttime speed enforcement was feasible. CDOT is currently setting signs within the zones (see zone chart, below) and will collect data and report back on results of this pilot initiative in the spring of 2012. CDOT worked closely with representatives of the Colorado State Patrol and the Division of Wildlife, using several comprehensive data sources, to identify nearly 100 miles of state highway that will see lowered nighttime speed limits through designated wildlife corridors.

Nighttime speeds will be reduced to 55 mph only where current speeds are posted at 60 or 65 mph, and only during migration season, September through April (due to migration patterns, signs in southwest Colorado corridors have been updated to reflect the enforcement through May). Other sections of highway will be signed “WILDLIFE CORRIDOR” but the nighttime speed will remain the same—fines will still be doubled for speeding, however. Motorists will begin to see the signs on the designated corridors (listed below) by the end of October, and possibly into November.

“Alerting drivers to the presence of wildlife is a critical step towards keeping roads safe for people and animals alike,” said Caitlin Balch-Burnett, Colorado Outreach Representative for Defenders of Wildlife. “Thanks to the hard work of all involved to make these wildlife crossing zones a reality, travelers are given a key tool in protecting themselves and our state’s wildlife.”

Non-Governmental Organization & Individual Wildlife Bill Sponsors:

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WILDLIFE ZONES 2010 (as of October 21, signs have been posted on US 24 and on US 550 north of Durango; others will go up in late October/early November)

CDOT Region	Hwy	Begin MP	End MP	Zone Location	Reduced Nighttime Speed?
1	SH 9	108	126	North of I-70	
3	SH 9	126	136.37	South of Kremmling to Green Mtn. Reservoir	Yes, 65 to 55
3	SH 13	28	38.81	North of Rittle	Yes, 65 to 55
3	SH 13	58	68	South of Meeker	Yes, 65 to 55
3	SH 13	68	88	South of Meeker	Yes
5	US 24	202	210	North of Buena Vista towards Granite	Yes, 65 to 55
4	US 36	25	33	Boulder to Lyons	Yes
3	US 40	93	103	East of Craig	
3	US 50	132.19	136.18	At Blue Mesa Reservoir	Yes
3	SH 82	31	36	West of Aspen	
5	US 160	113	121	East of Bayfield to west of Piedra Riv.	No (will remain 60 mph as speed test zone)
5	US 160	121	132	Piedra River to west of Pagosa	Yes, 60 to 55
5	US 550	26	35	North of Durango to Honeyville	Yes; 60 to 55
3 & 5	US 550	114	125	N. of Ridgway to S. of Montrose	Yes, 60 to 55

WILDLIFE ZONES 2010

CDOT Region	Hwy	Begin MP	End MP	Wildlife Zone	Reduced Night Speed?	Existing Five Year Accident Data for Wildlife Zone Areas			Existing Five Year Accident Data for Wildlife Zone Areas During Nighttime Enforcement Period		
						All Accidents (2002-06)	All WVC (2002-06)	WVC as % of All Accidents	All Accidents (2002-06) (Peak 4-01 Zone Test)	WVC Accidents (2002-06) (Peak 4-01 Zone Test)	WVC as % of All Nighttime Accidents
1	SH 9	108-126	126-136.37	Yes	127	60	47.24	67	49	72.99	
3	SH 9	126-136.37	136.37-146.37	Yes	122	75	61.48	65	55	84.52	
3	SH 13	28-38.81	38.81-48.81	Yes	102	71	69.61	47	34	72.55	
3	SH 13	58-68	68-78	Yes	125	70	55.95	54	33	60.91	
3	SH 13	68-88	88-98	Yes	111	60	53.96	55	33	60.91	
5	US 24	202-210	210-220	Yes	111	61	54.95	47	32	68.18	
4	US 36	25-33	33-43	Yes	100	76	76.00	46	47	102.17	
3	US 40	93-103	103-113	Yes	122	62	50.82	50	32	63.02	
3	US 50	132.19-136.18	136.18-146.18	Yes	41	26	63.41	14	12	85.71	
3	SH 82	31-36	36-46	Yes	20	16	80.00	13	10	76.92	
5	US 160	113-121	121-132	Yes	102	66	64.71	42	23	54.76	
5	US 160	121-132	132-142	Yes	102	67	65.70	48	46	95.10	
5	US 550	26-35	35-45	Yes	80	41	51.25	33	20	60.61	
5	US 550	114-125	125-135	Yes	80	41	51.25	33	20	60.61	
163	US 550	114-125	125-135	Yes	122	72	58.93	117	64	54.70	